

# Maine SRC-DBVI Meeting Minutes

November 19, 2014

1:00 - 4:00

Frances Perkins Conference Room  
Commerce Center, Augusta

**Present:** John McMahon, DBVI Director; Scott Murray, SRC-DBVI Admin. Assistant; Jim Phipps, Iris Network Director; Cheryl Peabody, ACB Maine; Nancy Moulton, Education Services for Blind and Visually Impaired Children; Brad Strause, AlphaOne; Sue Fairfield, Maine Parent Federation; Cindy Bernstein, DOE; Lynn Merrill, PTGDU; Kathy Despres, C.A.R.E.S. CAP Advocate; Annette Tilsley, VR Counselor; Chris Boynton, Maine State Library; Adam Zimmerman, Attorney; Walter Voitasek, Deaf-Blind rep

**Guests:** Brenda Drummond, Rehabilitation Consultant

**On Polycom:** David Perry, prior SRC member.

**1. Call to Order:** Meeting called to order by Kathy Despres at 1:06. After introductions, Kathy reiterated names for Dave, as conference system was not clear.

Agenda: Additional items requested: computer discussion, Karen Wolfe's planned appearance at the end of the meeting, update on first forum.

**2. Approval of Minutes:** Walter made motion to approve and Jim seconded but then commented that SRC had a session on the first day of the conference and the first topic at 9:00 was the electing of officers for the coming year. This was not included in the minutes and needs to be added. Kathy suggested approving the minutes in two sections. Nancy proposed amended motion to accept this section of the minutes as written and have Scott distribute separate document for approval, covering elections. Jim seconded. No discussion. Motion carried unanimously. Scott mentioned there would be forthcoming notes on all conference proceedings and Jim asked Scott to separate out the section where elections were held.

Brad's official terming-out date confirmed as December, deemed appropriate for him to vote on matters today.

**3. NewsLine Donation Request:** (Walter) Reiterated pitch for NFB Newsline program donation (although Kelly not present to confirm availability of funds) Seeking money to continue the year and also seeking collaborative sponsorship of \$5000 each from VR, Iris, MSL and other agencies. Walter stressed that the service is a crucial source of information for blind people, especially in rural state, right now about 400 people subscribe but expected to increase. Service costs \$30K per year, available 24/7. Chris asked for statistics on usage, Library budget used to cover it but wasn't sustainable. Walter reported that in Massachusetts 2,100 people signed up.

John had suggested Walter talk to SRC because of more flexibility around money, DBVI funding would require contract, and advertising angle won't work because DBVI isn't allowed to advertise. SRC could do one-time donation while statistics are being gathered. Looks like SRC has some under-spent areas that could be tapped, but would require budget amendment. Only about a month left before service is curtailed, but deadline is not a matter of needing the total \$30,000 if we can show we're making effort, and we could approach Steven King foundation again in year 3. (starts May 1, 2015)

Full budget is around \$17,000--confirmed by Lynn. \$5,000 would be a line item all its own. John supports idea of another venue to get notices out--not getting responses at the level we need with current efforts; also, access to communication fits SRC and DBVI. It's a great-looking idea on paper but at some point there needs to be quantifiable benefit; we need metrics about how many people are actually deriving benefit. Adam proposed making it a paid subscription service. Walter reports that subscribers are invited to donate. Chris reported previously low usage despite considerable subscription numbers, but with smart phones, usage would likely be higher nowadays. Pending information about budget, Chris suggested shelving the topic.

**4. New Business:** *Update Review of Work Plan* (John) E-mailed out 11/3. JVRTAC is the new TACE. John suggested 4 changes and one question. Jim favors of incorporating John's suggestions, with the exception of moving those membership responsibilities from the steering committee to the membership committee. Scott will edit the draft to include John's suggestions and send out to the group.

### **5. Committee Updates:**

*Steering:* Did not meet.

*Policy, Rules and Legislative:* Did not meet.

*Data:* No meeting.

*Transition:* Cindy reported meeting by phone to brainstorm. Decided the things fell into 3 general categories of goals and activities related to transition planning: 1. before and beyond the school-age range, 2. within and along school time and 3. stakeholders Group generated activities to identify goals. Report forthcoming. Kathy praised group's work.

*Web Site:* Chris reported web site work has been handed over to Scott. Minutes will be posted only after approval. Committee reports need to be included too. Work plan versions will be posted on line with dates. Chris also reported using Doodle to arrange phone conference with committee, but Jim reported that Doodle is not accessible.

*Membership:* John identified new prospect - has emailed Kathy. Two more packets sent out, prospective members encouraged to attend SRC meetings. Jim favors meeting prospective members before voting them in. Annette reports completing the E-rehab training, but not yet received a packet. Adam reports receiving packet, but not yet filled it out; also has concerns about his political engagements conflicting with SRC membership, but group not concerned.

## **6. Director's Report:**

*Employment Skills Program*--in third iteration, 10 people signed up, one withdrew because she got a job. The other 9 attended despite bad snowstorm and lost power - group was flexible with challenges and program went off well. They started their first job club session yesterday. Of the first 14 people, 10 went into employment, 71% employment rate. Program now popping up in different iterations nationwide (LA, SC); really helps our clients, staff, too, because we're able to do more of what we're trained to do in a more condensed amount of time. We are also looking at a model of this type of program for transition-age students with more career exploration.

Reviewed table of 45 competitive closures--2 more than usual average; last year only 37. Obviously one of the biggest factors is being fully staffed. Table lists type of job, full or part-time, wage, and list of employers at bottom of table. We have a lot of success with self-employment, 8 of 45. And as telecommuting becomes more accessible, we'll see more of that.

*Statewide Needs Assessment.* Dr. (Karen) Wollfe doing third public forum today at Career Center as well as staff discussions. Bangor forum was on Monday, people showed up to vent and Karen helped them focus on solutions. Numbers are smaller than hoped but good information being gathered. Staff surveys went out, too. Karen to complete survey for eye doctors, employers and previous 14 employment skills participants. Kathy asked for copy of survey. Formal report will

be distributed. Some staff concerned survey is very VR-driven and people who aren't in VR may skew the data, but survey left some things broad enough to apply to everyone, also includes 3-4 questions specific for VR counselors. Respondents also encouraged to send e-mail if they feel survey is too focused in one direction. Survey Monkey is constructed to route people based on what they answer, but not well laid out for blind and visually impaired staff, some of whom required assistance with it. Adam concerned about people from Maine whose vision care personnel are in Boston, some data may be missed.

*WIOA:* Mix of great stuff and complicated stuff with many opportunities for misinterpretation. Nothing specific about homemaker as viable closure (wasn't in previous version either), but opportunities exist to flexibly interpret the definition of a successful employment outcome. Janet Labreck aware of issue, needs feedback from SRC. Kathy cited frequent inquiries from RSA to CAP about homemaker closures. John mentioned Commissioner Labreck's plan to create enough broad interpretations to allow agencies to continue to serve homemakers, but will still need to be in the regs. John also mentioned RSA's lack of understanding of prevocational skills needs. Regulations will be out in January, then there will be a 30-60 day window to respond, best time to influence change is now. Kathy concerned, work needs to be done to get private insurance to pick up cost, also wondering why blindness community isn't pressing for coverage for blindness services. Jim cited Medicare's exaggeration of and apprehension about potential cost. They don't want to add to the problem until they fix the current situation. Lots of effort spent and no progress. John advised SRC to send letter to Commissioner Labreck support leeway in regulations. Lynn moved for SRC to write a letter of support for homemaker closure under WIOA. Cheryl seconded. All in favor, motion carried unanimously. Brad will write the letter and send to steering committee.

**7. Treasurer's Report:** None.

**8. CSPD Report:** None.

**9. 121 Grant Report:** None.

**10. CAP Report:** Kathy shared question from CAP listserv about immigrant population and requirements for VR services. John replied that there is no policy per se, but residency requirement is in the Rehab Act. The problem for some of immigrant population is their perspective on blindness, families oppressively protective, thus denying blind family member access to services. VR tries to work with community itself; first barrier to employment in the general community is learning English, need to "open the cultural door first".

**11. Employment First (EF):** Kelly absent, Jim reported, leading discussion about EF members representing groups (including DBVI-SRC) that feel they don't have the authority to make decisions without getting a vote of the body that sent them. Members are not being afforded much lead time to prepare themselves for a vote by discussing issues in advance with their respective groups. Last Friday's EF meeting included a last-minute vote on whether EF should sponsor or get a legislator to introduce a bill to phase out the subminimum wage certificate in Maine. Many questions remain regarding the effect of such a bill, and a number of those in attendance felt it necessary to abstain from voting because of uncertainty about their respective groups' opinions. Net effect is complete lack of effective voice for delegates on EF.

One possibility is for SRC to give delegate authority to call other members before an EF meeting to get a sense of the group's will. Kathy mentioned that most people don't want to give their opinion on the subminimum wage issue and felt this issue was forced through--no time for due diligence. Some attendees asked for vote to be postponed but it wasn't a motion, so vote proceeded anyway. Also, interesting weighting of influence in the room: DVR had 3 votes; DRC had 2. SRC had one. Kathy favors SRC to pressure EF to provide adequate notice before votes, otherwise what's the use of being involved? Jim doubts SRC will be able to get them to change.

Jim cited 10/30 EF agenda that included item about subminimum wage, and with this kind of group, planned discussion usually implies latitude for voting, meaning in effect we actually had two weeks' notice, yet no one could have anticipated the actual motion that was made, which suggests DRC is over-involved. Steering committee needs to discuss issue, Kathy would like to see bylaws change to include that a topic has to be put out with a certain amount of lead time before meetings. Brad mentioned argument with Rick Langlely--EF seemed to believe they provided information; some people already had it from other channels, one person mentioned Vermont's phase-out years ago, where 70 % of those phased out of subminimum wage employment are still unemployed.

Jim advised that if the agenda mentioned discussion only, then somebody could have raised a point of order about the vote being improper. Brad cited Kelly's desire that SRC suggest inclusion of parliamentarian to improve communication. Kathy favors 30-day notice for a call to vote. At Kelly's suggestion, Kathy will send out an e-mail to hold a steering committee conference call.

## **12. Miscellaneous**

*Computers for the Blind.* Jim sent info to Dave as per his request. Kathy will check back with him.

*Forums Update.* (Nancy) No SRC members at Monday's forum in Bangor. Food not provided for Monday or Tuesday forums.

*Newsline:* Lynn renewed discussion about Newsline issue, citing \$9,300 remaining in 2014 budget, could roll over into new budget. John cited concerns: 1. limited period crossing over, may have expired, and 2. if amendment to contract with Syntiro is required we could get hung up. But it looks like we have about \$3,000 unspent. Nancy cautioned about additional cost of website work for Scott and John B's time. Kathy concerned about upcoming educational needs around WIOA; i.e., CSAVR conference in April backs up with another conference so Washington time could be lengthy. Also, fall conference that DBVI doesn't go to but might be valuable for us to go to along with the spring conference and then add NCSAB. John suggested contacting Brenda to ask about what we can do within Syntiro contract.

Brad reopened discussion about Newsline. Chris clarified that his stats on usage were from 10 years ago; usage might be much higher now. Brad cautioned we need to be careful about setting a precedent with provision of support to NewsLine; may be a moot point if we can't transfer money. John will research the issue and if it looks like a possibility will initiate an e-mail vote.

**13. Adjournment:** Lynn made motion to adjourn. Walter seconded. All in favor. Meeting adjourned at 3:24.